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New online safety curriculum helps schools document CIPA compliance

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An animated alien, Sammy Smart, guides students through a new online digital safety program.

Starting this month, schools receiving federal e-Rate funding must have updated internet safety policies that show how they will educate minors about appropriate online behavior. Now, a new animated online curriculum is available to help schools fulfill this requirement and document their compliance.

The Federal Communications Commission last August amended the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) to include the digital safety education provisions of the Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act. Under the new rules, federal auditors may ask e-Rate applicants to produce evidence that they have educated their staff and students about internet safety. The e-Rate provides discounts of up to 90 percent of the cost of telecommunications service and internet access to eligible schools and libraries.

AUP Online, an instructional program created by California startup [Lersun Development](#) [2], helps schools document the digital safety education of their students, which could be helpful in the case of an e-Rate audit.

Students use individual logins to access courses on Lersun's website. After completing the required lessons, they electronically sign the district's internet Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). Lersun then compiles time- and date-stamped documentation of student participation so that districts can easily demonstrate CIPA compliance.

"Every year the AUP document must be signed, and every year [there must be] instruction. Schools need to have a way to document their policy [for] when the audit comes," said Lersun's founder, Mary Ann Sund, a former deputy superintendent of schools in Arcadia, Calif.

Lersun charges an annual fee of 50 cents per participating student, as well as a one-time setup fee of \$500 to \$1,000 for a school or district. Once schools account for the printing and materials costs of other online safety programs available online, AUP Online is "cheaper than free," Sund said.

During the development of AUP Online, she said, Lersun staff focused on "sticking to the basics so that teachers would not see it as intrusive" on class time.

Because the lessons are self-guided and hosted on a Lersun website, the course requires no teacher training and little support from schools' technology staff—teachers can take students to the computer lab during class, or simply assign the course as homework.

There are five versions of the program, of varying duration and complexity depending on grade level. The elementary-level version hit the market this past January, and the more robust middle school course will be available for this fall. A third version geared toward high school students will launch in spring 2013.

Beginning in the 10-minute kindergarten course, an animated character named Sammy Smart introduces students to basic internet safety concepts, such as what constitutes personal information and how school equipment should be used.

The lessons become more robust as students grow older, so that the fourth and fifth grade version contains discussions about not only personal safety, but also cyber bullying and ethical responsibility.

The middle and high school programs introduce new concepts such as source credibility, social networking, and sexting. As they follow along the lessons, the older students reflect on their personal experiences with internet safety in an embedded electronic journal.

At two hours, the middle school program is the longest of the AUP courses. Research shows that “the rubber hits the road” in internet safety issues among kids that age, Sund said.

She said the personal journal activity starts in sixth grade, because by that age, the goal is for students “not just to follow the rules, but to develop and follow their own rules.”

During Sund’s tenure as a deputy superintendent, she found online safety education to be insufficient: Once a year, teachers would read aloud basic rules and then pass around printed copies of the school’s AUP agreement for students to sign.

Through conversations with students, it became apparent to Sund that kids, especially at the elementary school level, lacked basic internet safety knowledge.

“It was amazing what the kids didn’t know—they did not know they shouldn’t go meet someone in the park. ... It was frightening, frankly,” Sund said.

AUP Online teaches online safety much more effectively than the former method of reading and signing print-outs, said Lisa Shigemasa, who teaches fourth and fifth grade at Baldwin Stocker School in Arcadia, Calif.

By the time Shigemasa tried the AUP Online courses around January, her students already had signed the school’s AUP four or five times before—but completing the online program made digital safety “much more real” for her students, she said.

As an example, Shigemasa pointed to a citation-maker activity: “No matter how much we tell them, ‘You have to do it,’” students don’t always listen, she said. In the AUP Online program, “they actually went and did it hands on.”

With audio, visual, and kinesthetic components, the online lessons appealed to all learning styles, Shigemasa said.

She also said her students loved the main character of Sammy Smart so much that several students wanted to repeat the program right away.

“With an animated character, there’s a little more to look at. It’s a little more fun, more pleasing to the eye,” said Jeff Campbell, a former Nickelodeon animator who designed, animated, and voiced Sammy.

He said that after testing Sammy as a superhero and as a cat, he intentionally designed the character to look unrecognizable.

“I just wanted him to look so different than anything anyone had ever seen, so kids would say, ‘Wow! What’s he all about?’” he said.

For the middle school program, Sammy Smart grows up slightly to be CyberSam. He loses his baby wings—in the same way that “baby teeth fall off,” said Campbell—and he acquires a ball cap and backpack. For the high school students, CyberSam changes into a flannel shirt and hipster jeans, speaks in a lower voice, and often says “dude.”

Sammy grows with the students so that they can relate to him as they complete the course year after year, Campbell said.

Although students sometimes repeat the same course material—for example, the lessons are the same for all four years of high school—Shigemasa said she did not anticipate redundancy being a problem.

Almost all of the questions have multiple possible answers, so “maybe next time [a student] will make a different decision just to see what happens,” she said.

Shigemasa said her students, whom she described as “very adept at multiple-choice tests,” enjoyed the difficulty of the questions.

Many of the questions were written so that “one [answer] might be better than the other, but the other might not be wrong. ... You had to think about it,” she said.

Shigemasa praised the program as an effective use of technology: “You want [students] to create, to produce, to be engaged, to think, and to make choices. This program is designed as [an opportunity for] higher-level, real-world,

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[2] Lersun Development: <http://www.lersun.com/>

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